

## **New Jersey CERT Programs Provide Super Bowl Support**

The Seattle Seahawks and the Denver Broncos were not the only teams hard at work on Super Bowl Sunday this past February. When New Jersey hosted the big game on February 2, several New Jersey CERT programs provided volunteers to support the state's 2-1-1-call center.

On a typical day, the New Jersey 2-1-1 phone number provides health and human services information to Garden State residents. In addition, individuals can call the number if a friend or family member goes missing. In the event of a disaster, however, the phone number is designed to become a key tool for sharing and collecting information. As Laura Marx, Executive Director of NJ 2-1-1 Partnership, explained, "During a disaster, we are the information portal for any citizen in New Jersey for preparedness information or disaster services."

There was a very real potential for a huge call volume to the 2-1-1 center if an emergency had occurred before, during, or immediately following the Super Bowl given that there were more than 80,000 fans attending the game at MetLife Stadium. During large-scale events like this, volunteers from a range of organizations play a huge role in supporting the call center in emergency or disaster situations.

CERT volunteers have supported the call center in the past, and drew on their prior experience to support the call center during the Super Bowl. "They're so well trained before they get here...they really understand incident command, and that's just so important," said Marx, in praise of the CERT volunteers. "Using the CERT teams has just been awesome in that way."

Even though no major incidents occurred during the Super Bowl, CERT members gained valuable experience by learning about the role of 2-1-1. CERT members were also trained in the [Unified Victim Identification System](#) (UVIS), a disaster management system that manages and coordinates all activities related to missing persons reporting and victim identification.

Seton Hall University CERT was one of the programs that sent volunteers. The Super Bowl's non-emergency activation provided an opportunity for the Seton Hall team to practice coordination and logistics at a different location from where its volunteers normally operate. Tom Giordano, Seton Hall's Assistant Director for Emergency Management, praised the experience. "It was an opportunity to be trained in the system," Giordano said. "At any future event, they now have a body of trained people from these various volunteer groups, sort of like a surge capacity for the 2-1-1 center."

Building lasting relationships between CERT programs and the call center was also an important component of the experience. Marx, the NJ 2-1-1 Director, explained that it is much easier to request volunteers from an organization if there is already an existing relationship, and the event was the first time that some of the CERT programs had volunteered at the call center. Having this established relationship means the call center can more easily request trained volunteers in the future.

"In a disaster, sometimes you feel really alone. Other people are at home with their families and they are doing their thing. Even if they don't have power, at least they're together," Marx said. "To be able to be with other groups of people who understand what it's like to work a disaster, and to be on the same page, is just a very special thing."